

Dear members of the Education Committee,

I write with grave concerns as a 19 year veteran teacher, former BEST portfolio mentor and scorer, and current TEAM mentor and paper scorer. My purpose for writing is to illuminate the issues of the implementation of the CT teacher evaluation system and the *Common Core State Standards*, now being referred to within our state as the *Connecticut Core Standards*. However, for the purpose of this correspondence, I will refer to them as the *CCSS*, the national name for the program.

First, the primary flaw in the *implementation* of *CCSS* is that there was little to no classroom teacher input as to how such standards could/should be implemented. Connecticut has a rich history of implementing demanding state standards and maintaining high levels of student achievement, so there is little debate as to whether or not rigorous standards are necessary for high student achievement. Connecticut teachers do not oppose the concept of the *CCSS*. However, the implementation of *CCSS* gave little time for teachers to become familiar with the *CCSS* and to make content specific adjustments for instruction in the classroom. That is a critical concern. Those responsible for the implementation were inappropriately blindsided and left ill-prepared to create or acquire materials to meet all of the required *CCSS* goals and objectives.

Furthermore, while the need for high standards is not debated, there certainly is debate as to whether or not the *CCSS* are *developmentally appropriate*. Input from teachers, the professionals who work with students daily, was not solicited. Instead, corporate leaders who lack an understanding of, among many things, the classroom environment and education of the whole child were given free rein to make rules of evaluation for students and educators, ironically, without critical data in this data-driven world! How was this even allowed?

Further, how can one think it reasonable that teachers who have not been made privy to the details and nature of the SBAC test be judged by their students' performances on that test? Students have not even had enough time to be educated using the new objectives let alone learn the process of taking the online SBAC tests. Worse, most schools do not have adequate technology to give such tests without further disrupting the students' entire education. Our school is fairly well-equipped due to grants, but still, all school computer banks are devoted fully to testing for no less than 8 weeks in the spring. That does not reflect the additional consumption of computer resources in the start of the year for baseline data testing, and mid-year data collection. All of this points to not only inevitably inaccurate assessment of students and teachers, but also reflects a punitive mindset that will drive away the best and the brightest from a teaching career in CT.

In addition, the teacher evaluation process is extraordinarily cumbersome and too timely to be an accurate and efficient means of teacher assessment. The teacher's hours of preparation before the lesson, the pre-observation meeting, the observation of the lesson, and the post-lesson reflection and meeting encompass no less than 9 -10 hours per observation. Consider that the proposal includes 3 – 4 mandatory formal observations for the entire staff. The real cost of our evaluation observations equal, on average, 38 hours per teacher taken away from working with students, creating lesson plans, assessing student work, making parent contacts, collaborating with colleagues, and participating in extra-curricular activities (just to name a few). Equal time would be sacrificed by administrators for each teacher as well. With over 60 staff in our school, one can see the complexity and drain on teacher and administrator's time.

Further, each teacher evaluation observation covers 6 domains with 15 subtopics, far too broad a spectrum for a 45 min class observation. Teachers in our school have been informed that

because the full range of objectives is impossible for a teacher to demonstrate within one lesson, we will all be deemed “effective.” Imagine that! Our teaching has our students achieving over 90% mastery in reading and writing, and yet, as an ELA teacher, I’m told that is not “exemplary” ~ only “effective.” Really?! I ask you: If an “A” is available, and you are told in advance that you can never earn it, would that motivate you? Not me! Irony lesson: In an effort to strengthen teaching in CT through legislation, the profession is instead being sabotaged and destroyed. Equally important to note; This evaluation process requires that each teacher must have 5 goals; 2 “Smart” goals based on standardized testing, 1 professional goal, 1 school-wide goal, and 1 parent/student goal (the last two of which are assigned by administration). One need not be a teacher to understand that being assessed on 5 goals, many of which the outcomes are not in the direct control of the employee is unreasonable at best!

It must be remembered that teachers are not manufacturers of widgets! We work with *children*, each with his/her own strengths, weaknesses, needs, visions, hopes, dreams, nightmares, concerns, fears, personality, circumstances, health. We work to educate and inspire children to love learning and find joy in questions. And for each, we must first provide a sense of safety, understanding, and a caring environment before he/she can even be open to learn. Constant standardized testing does not provide a safe environment, nor does it develop (as the proponents claim) a sense of resiliency. Rather, it creates anxiety, pressure to perform (and conform), and prioritizes tests results over fostering the student’s love of learning. I, personally, this year have had two students whose test anxiety became so intense that one was medically excused from school for two months, and the other left school opting for home schooling instead.

This standardized, myopic understanding of education takes its toll on children. Creativity is lost to lock-step instruction and dismisses those wonderful teachable moments upon which students and teachers alike thrive. Teachers are not machines. We read books, students, and situations before, during, and after teaching. Standardized instruction diminishes the significance of viewing the *whole child* when a singular outcome is valued more so than the process of learning. ***“Everyone is a genius, but if you test a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will spend its whole life thinking it is stupid,”*** Albert Einstein. Misguided attempts to increase student performance are unfortunately negatively impacting our children. Teachers see this daily. Students are losing their love of learning, their passion to ask questions and find answers, and their own understanding that each is far more than a grade on a test. I implore the members of the Education Committee to come witness this destruction first-hand before allowing corporate minds to continue to design educational goals without expertise. Give teaching back to the professionals! If you do so, I promise that I will let corporations continue to make widgets without my interference if they promise to let me educate my students without theirs.

Most sincerely,

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